



Coronavirus COVID-19

Employee Guidelines

Issued on 13th March 2020



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1. Aim of Guidance Document

This document has been issued to provide guidance for employees. Information has been obtained from HM Government (GOV.UK, 2020), and is provided with good faith and thought to be current on the 13th March 2020.

2. Information about the virus

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected.

3. Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- cough
- difficulty in breathing
- fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

4. How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Respiratory secretions produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes containing the virus are most likely to be the main means of transmission.



There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

- infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres) or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs
- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching door knob or shaking hands then touching own face) it is "very unlikely" to be spread through things like packages or food

Our current understanding is that the virus doesn't live on surfaces for longer than 72 hours.

There is currently little evidence that people who are without symptoms are infectious to others.

5. Preventing spread of infection

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

Public Health England (PHE) recommends that the following general cold and flu precautions are taken to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away
- wash your hands with soap and water often - use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean



6. When should I self-isolate?

People should stay at home for seven days if they have either:

- A high temperature
- A new continuous cough

"Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital," the NHS website adds. "You do not need to contact 111 to tell them you're staying at home."

7. When should I call 111?

The NHS is asking people to use its 111 online service if:

- You cannot cope with your symptoms at home
- Your condition gets worse
- Your symptoms do not get better after seven days

People are asked to phone 111 only if they cannot get help online.

8. What should I do if I'm self-isolating?

The NHS is asking people staying at home to:

- Try and keep two metres (three steps) away from other people in your home - especially older people or those with long-term health conditions
- Ask friends and family and delivery services to deliver food and medicine - but avoid contact with them
- Sleep alone if possible
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds on a regular basis
- Try to stay away from older people and those with long term health conditions
- Drink lots of water and take everyday painkillers - like paracetamol and ibuprofen - to deal with your symptoms
- Not have visitors and ask people to leave deliveries outside
- Not leave the house - including going for a walk or to schools or any public places



9. Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment for coronavirus and antibiotics do not work as they do not work against viruses.

Any treatment can only relieve symptoms while your body fights the illness, and you will have to self-isolate until you have recovered.

10. How long the virus can survive

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

Once similar viruses are transferred to hands, they survive for very short lengths of time. Regular cleaning of frequently touched hard surfaces and hands will, therefore, help to reduce the risk of infection.

Click [here](#) for hand washing guidance.

11. Guidance on facemasks

Employees are not recommended to wear facemasks (also known as surgical masks or respirators) to protect against the virus. Facemasks are only recommended to be worn by symptomatic individuals (advised by a healthcare worker) to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to other people.

PHE recommends that the best way to reduce any risk of infection is good hygiene and avoiding direct or close contact (closer than 2 metres) with any potentially infected person.

Any member of staff who deals with members of the public from behind a full screen will be protected from airborne particles.



12. What to do if an employee or a member of the public becomes unwell and believe they have been exposed to COVID-19

If the person has not been to specified areas in the last 14 days, then normal practice should continue.

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace, the unwell person should follow the guidance in section 6 & 7 above.

13. Returning from travel overseas to affected areas

People who have returned from Hubei Province, including Wuhan, in the last 14 days should avoid attending work. They should self-isolate and follow the guidance at point 6 & 7 above

Advice is in place for [what to do if you have returned in the last 14 days from specified countries or areas](#) (GOV.UK, COVID-19: stay at home guidance, 2020) which is being updated on an ongoing basis.

All other staff should continue to attend work.

14. What to do if a member of staff or the public with suspected COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

For contacts of a suspected case in the workplace, **no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID19 are awaited.** In particular, there is no need to close the workplace or send other staff home at this point. Most possible cases turn out to be negative. Therefore, until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that the workplace needs to take.



15. What to do if a member of staff or the public with confirmed COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

Closure of the workplace is not recommended.

The management team of the office or workplace will be contacted by the PHE local Health Protection Team to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.

A risk assessment of each setting will be undertaken by the Health Protection Team with the lead responsible person. Advice on the management of staff and members of the public will be based on this assessment.

The Health Protection Team will also be in contact with the case directly to advise on isolation and identifying other contacts and will be in touch with any contacts of the case to provide them with appropriate advice.

Advice on cleaning of communal areas such as offices or toilets will be given by [the Health Protection Team](#) (GOV.UK, Contacts: PHE health protection teams, 2019) and is outlined later in this document.

16. When individuals in the workplace have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19

If a confirmed case is identified in your workplace, the local Health Protection Team will provide the relevant staff with advice. These staff include:

- any employee in close face-to-face or touching contact
- talking with or being coughed on for any length of time while the employee was symptomatic
- anyone who has cleaned up any bodily fluids
- close friendship groups or workgroups
- any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case

Contacts are not considered cases and if they are well, they are very unlikely to have spread the infection to others:

- those who have had close contact will be asked to self-isolate at home for 14 days from the last time they had contact with the confirmed case and follow the [home isolation advice sheet](#) (GOV.UK, Advice for home isolation, 2020)
- they will be actively followed up by the Health Protection Team



- if they develop new symptoms or their existing symptoms worsen within their 14-day observation period they should call NHS 111 for reassessment
- if they become unwell with cough, fever or shortness of breath they will be tested for COVID-19
- if they are unwell at any time within their 14-day observation period and they test positive for COVID-19 they will become a confirmed case and will be treated for the infection

Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions and can continue to attend work.

17. Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, the employee **does need to provide written evidence of instruction from a GP or medical professional** - this is normally a fit note (Med 3 form) however for this situation this does not need to be.

An employee will be advised to isolate themselves and not to work in contact with other people by NHS 111 or PHE if they are a carrier of, or have been in contact with, an infectious or contagious disease, such as COVID-19.

18. Advice for staff returning from travel within the last 14 days

These staff can continue to attend work unless they have been informed that they have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

If individuals are aware that they have had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, they should follow point 6 & 7 above.

The latest country information is available on the [NaTHNac Travel Pro website](#) (Country Information, 2020).

19. Handling post, packages or food from affected areas

Employees should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of work. There is no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from specified areas.



20. Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the person has come into contact with must be cleaned including:

- all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids
- all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected.

If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents, according to current recommended workplace legislation and practice.

21. Rubbish disposal, including tissues

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It should be put in a safe place and marked for storage until the result is available. If the individual tests negative, this can be put in the normal waste.

Should the individual test positive, you will be instructed what to do with the waste.



Frequently asked questions

Q: Do I need a fit note?

If you are self-isolating for 14 days following advice given by the NHS, you can self-certificate for days 1 to 7 but will need a fit note to cover the remaining 7 days (as per the current requirements)

Q: A colleague who is in self-isolation, was recently in the workplace and has suspected coronavirus

There is no need for you to go home, continue to work as usual.

Q: I am unwell and I make a decision to self-isolate

Please follow the full absence procedures in the usual way.

These FAQs are for guidance purposes only - please continue to refer to the below link for up-to date information:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

Should you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact your account manager in the first instance or Human Resources on 020 8665 6746 ext. 4218.



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